



# Putney Historical Society News

Spring 2005

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**Board of Directors:**

Ruth Barton, President  
Lindley Speers, Vice President  
Stuart Strothman, Secretary  
Laurel Ellis, Treasurer  
Katie Graves Bowen  
Tom Jamison  
Barbara Taylor  
Jacquie Walker

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## The Putney Fire Department

Putney has long been rightfully proud of its fire department, which in 2004 responded to a record 343 calls, and gave 4300 additional volunteer hours over to maintenance, education, and training. As we look forward to our new firehouse on the solid ground of the old salt shed property across from the Cop, it seems like a good time to look back and consider some of the ways our fire department has served our community, and how things have changed over the years.

Our first hose companies were privately funded, which was the usual situation in the 1800s. In 1898, citizens of Putney voted to appropriate \$500 in support of the fire district, to protect town property. In 1899 W.A. Cole, having contributed \$350 to the

town's effort, installed a steam pump in his paper mill to provide power for the Putney Fire Department. In 1903 taxpayers voted to provide 700 feet of hose. Needless to say, this equipment only served the village district. In 1920 we purchased a chemical apparatus for firefighting called a soda water extinguisher, and we had some problems with this 'cutting-edge' equipment over the following decade.

In the late 1920s the fire insurance rates went up, and protection became a serious problem. In 1930, the town and village joined to purchase a new fire truck and other approved equipment; in 1934, voters allocated \$500 toward the purchase of a fire station. The town was prepared to move to a town-wide district.

The Town Report listed



Fireman's Ball Dance Card Cover, February 24, 1916: in collection of Putney Historical Society

Chief Dwight Smith with J. J. Knight, First Assistant Chief and Ernest Parker Second Assistant Chief. Other firefighters of the decade named were David B. Hannum, Sr.,

## Remembering Elaine Dixon

For more than thirty years Elaine has been an active participant in the Putney Historical Society.

Inez Harlow, one of the prime movers behind PHS, persuaded us (we were 'young blood' then) to help her with her curatorial work in the warm weather and research in

the cold weather—no part of the Museum was heated regularly back then.

Did Elaine know that her already busy life would include thirty plus years of answering letters and helping visitors in their search for information; reaching out to schools and homes for the elderly; helping

celebrate every bicentennial, starting with July 4, 1776; working on grants, and programs such as the six that accompanied the reburial ceremony by a Native American Shaman of some bones that were in the Museum; creating new displays; going to workshops and programs in Vermont, (continued on page 2)

by Laura Heller

## BOARD MEMBERS NEEDED!



Morris Dancers at the Town Hall—May 1999

This is proving to be a year of many unsettling changes for PHS. First our Vice President, Lyssa Papazian, resigned due to her role as Putney Selectperson. Next we were shocked by the resignation of our President, Fern Tavalin, who has left Putney after many years to live in Savannah, Georgia (where her husband, Peter, has found a plethora of work for a jazz pianist of his caliber). Beth Muskat resigned for personal reasons and in March we

were devastated by the untimely passing of Elaine Dixon, who (though not always an official board member) has been a vital part of the backbone of the Historical Society for decades. The remaining eight trustees have regrouped, elected longtime member, Ruth Barton to serve as President, until the next annual meeting at least, and Lindley Speers as Vice President. Ruth faces the daunting responsibility of coordinating

the move of all of our possessions to the upstairs of Town Hall. Knowing that every item that is moved now will eventually have to be moved at least once again and having no definite knowledge of where we'll ultimately be able to resettle, makes this a frustrating and tedious job.

If you have a strong interest in Putney's history and some time to donate to help at this critical time, please contact one of the board members or leave a message for us at the Town Hall (387-5862).

**"Any members who have a background in conservation or restoration are asked to contact the board."**

## MOVING!

The board, assisted by some strong friends, has been busy working on packing our entire collection. Due to a lack of space in the Town Hall we are dismantling our museum on the first floor. We have been storing all items in plastic bins due to the leaking roof on the second floor.

This project has been led by the energy of our new president Ruth Barton. She has worked tirelessly for the

past few months hauling boxes upstairs. Additionally, a great deal of credit goes to Katie Bowen (formerly Katie Graves), who has worked very hard on all aspects of this extremely important project.

While packing, we have re-discovered artifacts and documents which we are recording in a new electronic format. We hope to have these on display in

our new museum someday for the community to enjoy. Once we are moved upstairs, we hope to begin the restoration of collection. Our textile collection and books are in desperate need of this attention. Much of this will be done off-site by specialists.

Any members who have a background in conservation or restoration are asked to contact the board.



Elaine Dixon

## Remembering Elaine, cont'd...

(cont'd from page 1) New Hampshire, and Massachusetts if not further afield; sorting and cataloguing including the 'boxes and contents' that were stowed in every corner and still keep arriving—a sometimes fascinating but never ending job?

And then there was research. Research took her (and sometimes, us) to archives, libraries, and govern-

ment offices near and far. Information collected by Elaine and enhanced by notes in her handwriting covered a wide variety of subjects; three of her interests that come to mind were local theater, her neighborhood, and Charles LeSeur, the French artist who produced (1816) an early visual image of Putney.

I know Elaine enjoyed the work she was doing. I

know she looked upon Putney as a common ground on which we all stand, and its history a resource we all share. We will miss her.

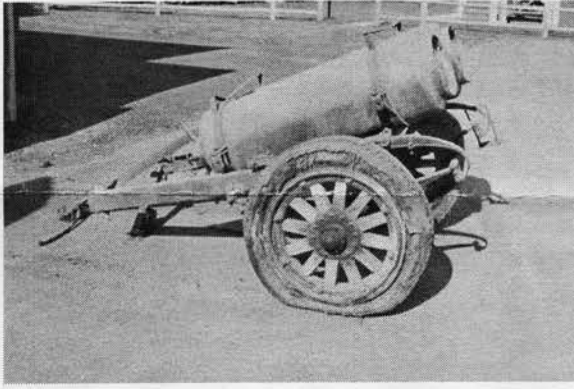
## Putney Fire Department cont'd...

(cont'd from page 1) Leonard Howard and Elmer Gassett. Major fires noted in town records were the Kathan and Fuller fires (1929), H. F.

Jones, and a forest fire at Stockwells (1931), George Aplin and D. D. Cory (1932), the Loomis place and George Gassett (1933), Aiken (1935), the barn at Putney School (1936), the Vassar Paper Mill (1937), the chemistry room

at Putney School (1937), E. Holton and Holway (1938), and a forest fire on West Hill (1939). Twenty chimney fires per year was the norm - the prevention of which the department recommended an occasional burning of powdered sulfur. In March 1949 an intense fire that took 45 men over two hours to bring under control, gutted the Bucket Factory. The fire left 10 men out of work until the factory was reopened. In

1958 and 1959, the initial construction of the current fire station took place, partially supported by a concrete abutment connected to the



Soda Water Extinguisher for Putney Fire Department (1978 photo)

Sacketts Brook dam.

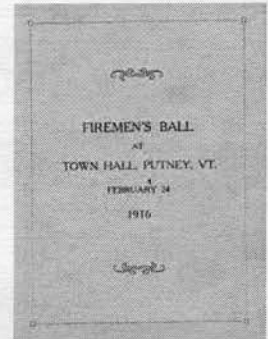
The Town Hall was the setting for many social functions through most of the 20th century, including over fifty years of Fireman's Balls sponsored by the Putney Hose Co. and the Putney Daughters. An elegant "dance card" from the Firemen's Ball on February 24, 1916, in the collection of the Putney Historical Society, lists twenty-four dances beginning with the Grand

March and Circle; others include Lady Walpole's Reel and Morning Star.

Originally, we had a paid fire department. In 1903, voters decided to pay firemen 25¢ per hour while attending a fire. In 1936, citizens voted to pay firemen \$3.00 each per year, and deduct 25 cents for each meeting not attended. In 1944, firemen were paid specifically "when the siren blows or in case of chimney fires" at the rate of \$1.00 for the first

hour, and \$.75 for "all time spent thereafter." And to think, this is all considerably more than volunteers of the Putney Fire Department currently make!

Information for this article was drawn from the 1953 and 2003 Putney history texts, a record of Town Meeting minutes and Selectboard reports, and from documents on file at the Putney Historical Society. Quotes are taken from the 1944 Town Meeting minutes.



Inside page of dance card from Fireman's Ball

**"In 1903, voters decided to pay firemen 25¢ per hour while attending a fire."**

## OLD-FASHIONED VARIETY SHOW AT PUTNEY COMMUNITY CENTER

It happened on March 12, 2005 but it seemed like we'd stepped back in time.

Thanks to many weeks of planning done by Marilyn Loomis, Rosemary Bryant, and Val Harlow, those who braved the heavy snow and came to see the show were rewarded by their very own friends and neighbors, who provided song, dance, gymnastic agility, local comedy,

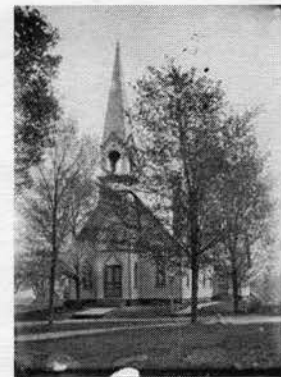
and lots of fun.

\$361 was raised for the handicap access fund at the Center and refreshments were provided by the eighth grade of Putney Central, who raised nearly \$200 for their class trip to Montreal.

Despite the snow the house was packed, and it was great to see kids running around the aisles and people of all kinds gathered together

at the Community Center, the way it was for many decades, years ago.

Many people have expressed great interest in having another variety show very soon. Hats off to the people of Putney who have led the way to the revitalization of the Community Center. (This is how history should be made!)



The Putney Community Center, in the early 1900s

## PUTNEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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We're on the web!  
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Putney  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Happy Spring to Members of Putney Historical Society,

As many of you may know, we have had a great turn over of officers since the annual meeting. Our vice-president felt she could not continue, as her duties as selectperson are quite time consuming. Our president had a sudden move to Georgia, and board member Beth Muscat resigned for personal reasons.

I have agreed to take the office of president until the next annual meeting. We'll see where things go from there.

The big challenge facing the Society at this time is the moving of our collection to the upper floor of the Town Hall. The town offices are needing more space as they modernize and update their record keeping, etc., and they have asked that we vacate the space we have been using downstairs. When we get all of our holdings upstairs, we will need to see if it is possible or feasible to have a museum and office there.

I feel it may be time for the society to do some heavy-duty fundraising and start looking for a building of our own or look to building one in some area of town. If anyone had any thoughts, ideas, suggestions, etc., please contact me or a member of the board.

I look forward to seeing you all at the annual meeting in the fall.

Ruth Barton

## SEARCHING FOR A HOME

Nothing lasts forever and Putney Historical Society has found itself in search of a new home. At the moment we are in the midst of hurriedly packing up our collections and moving them to the upstairs of the Town Hall into temporary storage.

The current plan is to try to keep our subject and genealogy files in a small area of the meeting room where they will still be accessible to people who wish to do research. After repairs are completed on the Town Hall roof, we hope to be able to reorganize



our objects, artifacts and photographs and set up small, temporary exhibits at various locations around the village.

One of the possibilities for the future is that we can have a new museum in the big hall and utilize the stage and small rooms on the second floor for storage and

work space. Another is to begin a quest for a new space to call our own where we can settle in without fears of having to move yet again.

Ideally, we will someday have a bridge across Sacketts Brook to the Thwing Mill and there we can house

the larger tools and implements in our collection. Perhaps we could also make use of the land on Mill Street that was also donated to us by the Wilson Family and eventually construct a building to make a new, accessible home for the long term. That is our dream.